

Pilgrim power plant to close

June 2019 date announced

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Pilgrim nuclear power plant in Plymouth will shut down by June 2019. Pilgrim's owner, Entergy Corporation of New Orleans, LA, made this announcement on October 13. In its new release, Entergy cited "poor market conditions, reduced revenues and increased operational costs" as the reasons for the closure of the 43-year old nuclear power station.

"The decision to close Pilgrim was based on a number of financial factors (including)... low wholesale energy prices brought about by record low natural gas prices driven by shale gas production, which has significantly impacted Pilgrim's revenues," stated the press release.

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"The decision to close Pilgrim was incredibly difficult because of the effect on our employees and the communities in which they work and live," said Leo Denault, Entergy's chairman and chief executive officer in the news release. "Our people at Pilgrim are dedicated and skilled, a wonderful blend of young professionals and seasoned, experienced veterans, who for decades have been generating clean power and contributing millions of dollars of economic activity to the region. But market conditions and increased costs led us to reluctantly conclude that we had no option other than to shut down the plant." John Dent, Jr., the site vice president at Pilgrim, called the closure "a difficult decision." Over 600 people work at Pilgrim.

"Our exceptional team includes military veterans, working parents, civil engineers, physicists, environmental scientists and hundreds of other nuclear industry professionals," Dent said. "They are the reason why closing the plant was such a terribly difficult decision." The timing of the shutdown will depend upon many factors and will be decided sometime early next year. Massachusetts Congressman Bill Keating said that Entergy's lack of oversight regarding the plant's safety was a factor in the closure. "Entergy's shutdown announcement was not surprising given their unwillingness to deal with current safety standards," stated Keating in a press release. "This announcement marks the next phase where great scrutiny is necessary to make sure Entergy is responsible for maintaining proper safety standards throughout the closure process – something they failed to do during their operations. To this end, Entergy must maintain their skilled workforce at Pilgrim, where workers are both trained and experienced in addressing emergencies. They also must cooperate with the town of Plymouth and federal officials on waste removal and storage issues." Keating added that he has already begun "coordination and oversight efforts...and will continue to monitor Entergy's decommissioning plan." Co-chairman of the Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee Mary "Pixie" Lampert said Tuesday she was not

surprised at the announcement because major stock brokerage houses recently downgraded Entergy's stock, advising investors to sell. "The handwriting was on the wall that they were going to close because they were losing money hand over fist," she said.

While some might think Lampert, who has been fighting to shutter Pilgrim since 1987, would be ecstatic about Pilgrim's impending closure, she is far from it. She wants the nuclear reactor closed ASAP.

"They announced they are going to close in 2019, which is not soon enough, because between now and the time they shut it down is an extremely dangerous time," Lampert said. "Entergy isn't making any investment in Pilgrim. Running an old reactor on the cheap is dangerous. Pilgrim should shut down now, saving them money and us time."

Lampert said Pilgrim has been declared one of the three most dangerous reactors by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission because it is old and unsafe. In September, the NRC announced it had downgraded Pilgrim's safety rating after many unplanned shutdowns and ongoing problems with the plant's safety relief valves.

Lampert won't be satisfied until the radioactive matter at the plant is safely contained.

"I can't take up a new hobby yet," she quipped, adding. "When it closes there is a ton of work to do. Nobody can rest until the spent (nuclear) fuel pool is in dry casks." Lampert is worried about how the aftermath of Pilgrim will be handled. She said the NRC does not require a complete clean up of the Pilgrim site; it only requires the buildings to be demolished to ground level. Lampert also wonders about the radioactivity that will be left behind.

"We don't want it mothballed for 60 years," she said of Pilgrim. "We don't want the emergency planning to end. We don't want the payments (from Entergy) to stop for environmental testing."

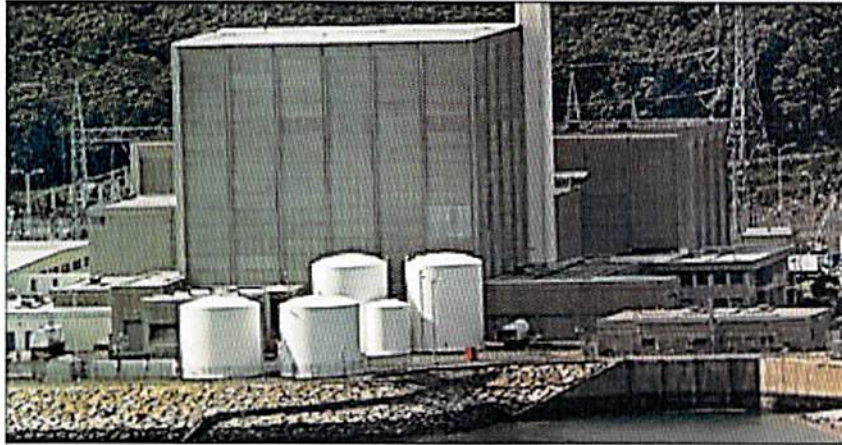
If Pilgrim is mothballed for six decades, then Entergy and its money will be long gone, said Lampert, adding that it will be the taxpayers of Massachusetts who will be the ones picking up the bill to deal with what's left behind. Lampert is calling for a regional citizen's panel for the decommissioning process because she feels what happens at Pilgrim after its closes affects more than Plymouth.

According to Entergy's news release, after the shutdown, Pilgrim will transition to decommissioning: "The Pilgrim nuclear decommissioning trust had a balance of approximately \$870 million as of Sept. 30, representing excess financial assurance of approximately \$240 million for license termination activities above NRC-required assurance levels."

Once Entergy completes its filings with the NRC for the planned shutdown activities, it will know whether any more money will be required. Then it "will specifically address funding for spent fuel management, which will be required until the federal government takes possession of the fuel and removes it from the site, per its current obligation. No additional funding is anticipated at this time," stated the press release. Duxbury town meeting voters addressed the decommissioning money issue this March when they approved an article that supported

legislation to require owners of commercial nuclear reactors to pay an annual post-closure funding fee, which would be placed in a trust fund with the state treasurer.

Lampert has said that Entergy needs more money for decommissioning than it has currently saved, noting that it cost \$1.23 billion to decommission the smaller Vermont Yankee nuclear power station, which closed last December.



Pilgrim nuclear power plant in Plymouth.

Photo by David L. Ryan/Boston Globe

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